

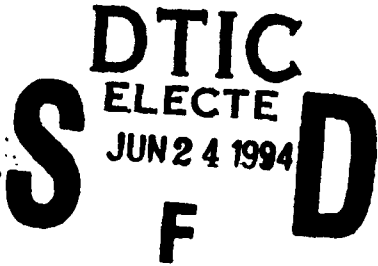


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**AIR WAR COLLEGE  
AIR UNIVERSITY**

**SOMALIA AND VIETNAM  
"DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN"**

by

**James M. Corrigan**

**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM  
REQUIREMENT**

**Advisor: Colonel Donald Waddell  
Prof. Sandy Cochran**

**MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA  
APRIL 1994**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE:** Somalia and Vietnam: "Deja Vu All Over Again"

**AUTHOR:** James M. Corrigan, Lieutenant Colonel

During the recent involvement in Somalia, U.S. leadership likely repeated mistakes that were made by senior leaders during the Vietnam conflict. This article uses the questions posed by Philip A. Crowl in his Harmon Memorial Lecture presented to the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1977 as a basis to compare the two conflicts and show areas where we did not apply lessons of the Vietnam conflict to Somalia. Besides illustrating general similarities of the two conflicts, the article discusses in detail how military strategy did not support national objectives in each conflict. Additionally, the article states that future conflicts in the post Cold War world are likely to resemble the Somalian scenario where cultural friction exists. In such crises it is critical to establish national objectives that present viable exit options and design military strategy that is not so limited that achieving objectives is impossible. Finally, the article suggests that it is impossible to directly apply lessons learned in one conflict to future crises. Rather, knowing the lessons of past conflicts allows one to selectively apply these lessons when facing new challenges.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Lt. Colonel James M. Corrigan holds a B.S. Degree in Economics and Management from the United States Air Force Academy and an M.S. Degree in Management/Human Relations from Webster State University. During his Air Force career, he has flown T-38 and F-16 aircraft in ATC, USAFE, PACAF, and Air Combat Command. Lt. Colonel Corrigan most recently completed a tour as Commander, 34th Fighter Squadron, 388th Fighter Wing, Hill AFB Utah. He is a Distinguished Graduate of Air Command and Staff College, and currently is a student at the Air War College. Lt. Colonel Corrigan and his wife, Kimberly, have three children.

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## SOMALIA AND VIETNAM: "DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN?"

*We need to know for instance, what assumptions led Americans to conclude that it was desirable and feasible to engage in "nationbuilding"—a mammoth somehow coordinated program of social engineering to reverse in a matter of years, the historical undercurrents of sectional, tribal, ethnic and religious separatism...*

Rand study of Vietnam, 1969 (8:6) *with the*

*Our critical error was to ignore one of the iron laws of war: Never go in without knowing how you are going to get out. Successive American administrations upped our commitment by increments—first in aid, then in noncombat advisors, and finally in combat soldiers—without having clearly in mind how these increases would achieve our goals.*

Former President Nixon, 1985 (20:46) ✓

Retired Colonel Harry Summers states, "*History...repeats itself—the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.*" (23:16) I submit that history does not necessarily repeat itself. However as the above quotes show, we often repeat the mistakes of old conflicts when presented with new challenges. When determining what role the U.S. will play when facing new crises, it is the responsibility of civilian and military leaders to avoid repeating mistakes by applying the lessons learned from previous conflicts. Our current involvement in Somalia suggests that we did not learn from the mistakes made in previous military confrontations; most notably Vietnam. *Summers*

There are several noteworthy similarities as well as unique circumstances surrounding these two conflicts. What follows is a comparison of the two events. *Contrast* By analyzing and comparing mistakes made, we can hopefully avoid saying "Deja Vu all over again" when presented with similar conflicts in the future. In this comparison I will first set the stage by addressing general similarities.

I will then discuss the conflicts in detail by applying the six questions posed by Philip A. Crowl in his Harmon Memorial Lecture at the U.S. Air Force Academy on 6 October 1977. In Crowl's view, history suggests that strategists ask several questions before engaging in any war or actions that may lead to war. (14:1) By using these questions as a basis for analysis, one will see that U.S. senior leadership likely repeated mistakes of the Vietnam conflict in Somalia. Additionally, one will learn that Somalia has presented unique challenges which are in fact, very difficult to solve.

## GENERAL SIMILARITIES - VIETNAM AND SOMALIA

### SIMILARITY 1: A NEW WORLD ORDER

When looking at U.S. international standing before Vietnam and Somalia, two similarities appear. First, prior to each conflict, the U.S. was in a single-power hegemony position. Secondly, because of the hegemonic standing, the U.S. perceived that entry into each conflict was in its national interests. Regarding Vietnam, one can argue that the groundwork was completed for entering the war after World War II. *I'm not so sure that I agree with this - USSR* *PRC* *1930* *1949* *1975* *1979* *1980* *1981* *1982* *1983* *1984* *1985* *1986* *1987* *1988* *1989* *1990* *1991* *1992* *1993* *1994* *1995* *1996* *1997* *1998* *1999* *2000* *2001* *2002* *2003* *2004* *2005* *2006* *2007* *2008* *2009* *2010* *2011* *2012* *2013* *2014* *2015* *2016* *2017* *2018* *2019* *2020* *2021* *2022* *2023* *2024* *2025* *2026* *2027* *2028* *2029* *2030* *2031* *2032* *2033* *2034* *2035* *2036* *2037* *2038* *2039* *2040* *2041* *2042* *2043* *2044* *2045* *2046* *2047* *2048* *2049* *2050* *2051* *2052* *2053* *2054* *2055* *2056* *2057* *2058* *2059* *2060* *2061* *2062* *2063* *2064* *2065* *2066* *2067* *2068* *2069* *2070* *2071* *2072* *2073* *2074* *2075* *2076* *2077* *2078* *2079* *2080* *2081* *2082* *2083* *2084* *2085* *2086* *2087* *2088* *2089* *2090* *2091* *2092* *2093* *2094* 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With hegemony, the U.S. assumed responsibility to help rebuild other major world economies. Through the Marshall and Dodge plans, we undertook to rebuild the European and Japanese economies. To make a long story short, our perceived role as a world leader guided our efforts in the Pacific to rebuild the Japanese economy and protect her markets in Southeast Asia. This fact, combined with concern for Soviet expansion (Domino Theory) set the stage for our entrance into the Vietnam conflict. (9:87) We felt that it was our duty to protect the free world: a fact articulated by President Harry Truman in 1947 when he proclaimed, *"It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."* (18:373) This policy continued through the Kennedy administration and was illustrated in the new President's inaugural address:

*Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the success of liberty.* (12:245)

With temporary hegemony, concern for the Domino Theory, and our role as a beacon of democracy, we understandably concluded that freedom of South Vietnam was in our national interests.

In comparison with the pre-Vietnam years, the U.S. has returned to a position of hegemony. The Cold War is over for the time being; and we stand as the world's strongest economic and military power, again facing the decision of reverting to isolationism, becoming the world's policeman, or abdicating that role to the United Nations. It appears that Somalia has occurred when we were facing the dilemma of determining what national interests and policy should be comprised of to deal with the post Cold War world. Michael Mandelbaum, President Clinton's campaign advisor on foreign policy concurs by stating:

*I think we're kind of floundering with the end of the Cold War. We've lost our road map. During the Cold War we knew what our foreign policy was and everything was geared to a fight with the Soviet Union. (19:11a)*

U.S. policy tends to be shifting from the hegemonic role that was present after WWII and the immediate post Cold War period. The current administration is concentrating on domestic affairs (similar to Johnson's Great Society program) and making unprecedented defense budget reductions. Somalia however challenged the new administration before the it could determine national interests and policy for this new world order.

#### **SIMILARITY #2: NEW ADMINISTRATIONS WITH DOMESTIC AGENDAS**

Although President Kennedy had increased our Vietnam presence to 16,500 advisors before his death, it was new Democratic President Johnson who inherited the dilemma on whether to introduce large force numbers into Vietnam. (9:245) LBJ had not supported the U.S. sponsored coup of the Premier of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, and he was immediately faced with the tough decision of providing more monetary aid to the South Vietnamese government. After hearing a brief by Secretary of Defense MacNamara only two days after Kennedy's assassination, the president said:

*So, they'll think with Kennedy dead we've lost heart...The Chinese. The fellas in the Kremlin...They'll be wondering just how far they can go...I told them they got it--more if they need it [reference financial aid to South Vietnam]...I told them to go back and tell those generals in Saigon that Lyndon Johnson intends to stand by our word, but by God, I want something for my money...and I want them to leave me alone, because I've got some bigger things to do right here*

*LBJ wanted  
to fight  
w/ \$ not  
US troops?*

*at home...I feel like I just grabbed a big juicy worm  
with a right sharp hook in the middle of it...(24:2)*

The above quote illustrates President Johnson's view of the Vietnam war. It was a war he had inherited, one that interfered with his greater domestic plans, and one that he wanted to win with minimum time spent on formulating strategy. His feeling on war in general can be summed by a quote he made in July 1965: *"Every time we have gotten to the culmination of our dreams, the war bells have rung...If we have to fight, I'll do that. But I don't want...to be known as a War President."* (2:87)

In comparison, the current administration inherited an equally uncertain situation in Somalia. President Bush committed troops under U.S. command in Somalia with the sole purpose to guarantee the distribution of food to a starving population. (22:14) He did not try to disarm any belligerents. However, the current administration, with emphasis on using United Nations command structure, permitted the U.N. Secretary-General to use military forces in a manhunt for a renegade leader. Under U.N. control the mission has been expanded beyond the original mission espoused by the Bush administration. I will return to this later. Concerning this shift in objectives, Colonel Harry Summers states, *"Like LBJ, he [President Clinton] inherited a foreign policy debacle in making, and, like Johnson, he has managed to make the problem even worse..."* (23:16) The end result is that the current administration, like the Johnson administration, has inherited a complex situation with little opportunity to establish a policy. Compounding the problem is president Clinton's mandate to concentrate on domestic affairs.

*Is not Clinton more willing to commit troops instead  
of \$ ... Then LBJ?*

6

*This argument is stronger  
than #1!*

### COMPARISON #3: CIVILIAN - MILITARY DISCONNECTS?

Although the Clinton administration has shown some confidence in military leadership, there are several areas that resemble conditions in the Johnson administration during the Vietnam war. ✓

Regarding LBJ, there is no question on how he felt about the qualifications of his military leaders:

*"I'm suspicious of the military...They are always so narrow in their appraisal of everything. They see everything in military terms." (23:16)*

*But LBJ did have military experience - - - ?*

In Shadow on the White House, George Herring attributed LBJ's mistrust and poor understanding of the military to two factors: One, his brief tour in the military, and two, his emphasis on domestic issues during his political career. (2:89) Herring continues by saying that President Johnson states he had *"...no illusions of military expertise...If we start making the military decisions, I wonder why we paid to send them to West Point."* (2:97)

To date, President Clinton has shown some trust of military leadership, but due to his lack of military experience, he has a reputation for incomplete understanding of the military profession. Like Johnson, he has spent the majority of his career involved in domestic issues, and has a very aggressive domestic agenda as President. Additionally, the administration's efforts to reduce the armed forces and the controversy surrounding the homosexual issue have added to the feeling of a lack of understanding of the profession of arms. ✓

*Similar...*

More importantly however, is the similarity of personalities both presidents selected to be their advisors, particularly in the area of SECDEFS and staffers. President Johnson relied on Robert MacNamara heavily for advice during the Vietnam conflict. MacNamara was a brilliant manager who gained respect for bringing the PPBS decision making process to the Pentagon. (11:250) From mid-1965 it was well known that there were significant differences between MacNamara and JCS

on Vietnam military strategy. (12:245) MacNamara was not concerned with "keeping the military happy" and preferred not to have the entire JCS meeting with the president. (12:249) As a result, there was little military representation at key Vietnam decision making meetings, and as Douglas Kinnard says, *"Failure to carry through the intent of that statute [using JCS as advisors] was to have some rather profound consequences on the conduct of the Vietnam war."* (12:249) Up until 1967 key military decisions concerning the air campaign were made at the Tuesday luncheon without any representation from the military. (12:249)

*w/ no military experience!*

MacNamara also relied heavily on a civilian staff of "whiz kids" to assist in formulating strategy, force requirements and resolving competing military issues. This allowed him to be an active participant in all military strategy issues and tended to further erode the military's contribution. Kinnard says, *"In effect, it was alleged, decisions were being made by civilians on military questions without proper consultation with the professional military."* (12:51) Additionally, defense decisions tended to become political involving influential congressmen, a call from the White House, or *"Even by a career commitment on the part of some official in the Pentagon."* (12:251)

Regarding the role of civilian advisors, Colonel Summers says, *"Defense Secretary Robert MacNamara and his 'whiz-kid' underlings had a willful ignorance of things military, and their 'strategies' of gradualism were instrumental in our defeat [in Vietnam]."* (23:16) Concerning use of civilian advisors rather than military expertise in the Vietnam bombing campaign, Colonel A.L. Gropman states:

*...Key civilian advisors did not understand how air power had contributed to victory in the second World War, especially in the Pacific Theatre, and how it had helped end the ugly stalemate in Korea in 1953. They*

*also would not listen to those who did. Their complete misreading of the enemy, combined with their misunderstanding of air power, led to a series of bombing halts in the false hope that the North Vietnamese, with relief from limited pressure, would see the error of their ways and negotiate a peace or withdraw from South Vietnam. (7:274)*

In comparison, former Defense Secretary Aspin and the current administration have relied to a certain extent on civilian "whiz-kid" advice in military strategy. For instance, Secretary Aspin's rejection of a military request for additional armor to protect American forces in Mogadishu appears to have been recommended by his civilian advisors who were concerned about congressional alarm at the force build up. Shortly after denial of the military request, 13 U.S. soldiers were killed, 77 wounded, and three helicopters were lost in fighting with guerrillas. (5:1) While it is not clear whether or not additional armor would have prevented this incident, a controversy ensued. In response to the incident Senator John McCain, an Arizona Republican said, *"I think we need to find out how many lives were lost because of the refusal of the civilian leadership in the Pentagon to listen to the military leadership."* (5:1) Not one to mince words, Harry Summers says of the incident:

*Civilian-appointee "whiz-kid" wannabes crowed about how they were going to 'reimpose' civilian control over the military...but when the consequences of their petty power trip [Mogadishu killings] turned bloody, they did not have the moral courage to stand by their actions. (23:16)*

Clearly, civilian control is a critical component of our democratic society. However, when one takes the "military" out of the military strategy formulation process, as occurred in Vietnam and in the above incident in Somalia, one undermines the development of sound strategy. When forces



Where did this breakdown in VN?  
in Somalia...?

are committed to a conflict, it is the obligation of military leaders to articulate recommended military strategy and provide military advice to key civilian leadership. Furthermore, sound military advice depends on professional competency. When the decision is made not to use advice based purely on political concerns, it is important that both civilian and military leaders look at the impacts of the decision. Impacts may in fact make it impossible for the military strategy to achieve objectives. Leaders then should make every effort to protect the military forces involved until alternative military strategy can be formulated to pursue the original objectives, or change the objectives. This we did not do in Vietnam or in the Somalian example above.

The general similarities of the Vietnam and Somalia conflicts are apparent. A more in depth comparison of the two events in terms of Crowl's key questions reveals similarities in national objectives and military strategy relationships. Additionally, this examination highlights unique issues in Somalia that have application for the future.

#### QUESTION #1: WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Before entering any conflict or action where troops may have to face combat, it is critical to have a clear understanding of the specific national interests, policies, or objectives to be achieved by the proposed action. Additionally, leaders should determine the value attached to the objectives. In regard to objectives, Carl von Clausewitz said that *"War is ...a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."* (10:07)

Additionally, he said that the original motive for war or the political objective, will determine the military objective and the amount of effort it requires. (10:81)

*What are the reasons?*  
Depending on which scholar you believe, there are many different reasons why the U.S. entered the Vietnam war. Ideas may vary from protecting France's interest, Containment, the Domino Theory, or our hegemonic view as the world's policeman. (2:28,29,32,43) What did make Vietnam a national interest to the U.S.? I offer that we entered the war for all of the above reasons. As I have discussed, after WW II our position of hegemony followed by the advent of the Cold War, placed the U.S. in the lead in the struggle for good against evil; for the weak in the struggle against the strong. In 1991 author David Levy wrote the following in his book, The Debate Over Vietnam, explaining our powerful justification for greater involvement in world affairs during the Cold War years:

*...That justification consisted of an appeal to fulfill clear moral duties whenever such basic principles as justice, freedom, and democracy were under attack by unscrupulous men and nations. Americans were called by their most cherished ideals...To stand...for decency, for charity and protection of the weak...(13:19)*

Levy suggests that Vietnam occurred in a time when these ideals were a driving force in determining our national interests. (13:20) In battling this evil, our policy of Communist Containment supported this national interest. Containment had become our policy beginning with the Marshall plan, to help rebuild Europe after WW II to strengthen it against Communist influence, to the Korea Peninsula, where we felt communism had gone beyond mere subversionary tactics. (13:16) Given our national interests and Containment policy the stage was set for our entrance into Vietnam. But what was our policy and supporting national objectives there?

President Kennedy made the first clear policy statement concerning South Vietnam when he said, "The security of South Vietnam is a major interest of the United States as other free nations."  
(13:3) We were convinced we were defending an attack from an outside aggressor, namely North

Vietnam. President Johnson, justifying why America was entering the conflict, said, "...In order to help defend a brave people who are under attack that is controlled and that is directed from outside their country." (13:37) Thus, our national military objective became that of preventing the defeat of South Vietnam by the North. *No issue this was so in 1954?*

The above information is important to set the stage, but let us refer back to the original question - what is it all about? In retrospect, I contend that Vietnam was about a civil war; not about South Vietnam facing defeat by another country. Senator George McGovern said in 1987:

[The conflict] ...Was always described by the Johnson administration and the Nixon administration as aggression from the north against the south...But in reality is that it was essentially a struggle between two groups of Vietnamese for control of their country: one group that had fought against the French and tried to establish independence; another group which to a great extent had played little or no role in that struggle or...had gone along without protest against French rule. (9:19)

I suggest, as does Senator McGovern, that we did not understand Vietnam history and its culture as it applied to the conflict. The Cold War mentality led us to believe that any Communist insurgency especially in this area of the world was supported by Beijing or Moscow. (9:22) An example of poor U.S. understanding of the situation involved our perceptions of what motivated Ho Chi Minh. He was a Communist but he was not a puppet of China as we suspected. He had dealt with China to get them out of Vietnam in 1946, but said, "*I would rather smell French dung for five years than eat Chinese dung for a thousand years.*" (9:22) Had we understood that this was a civil war, it may have influenced our decision to support the South Vietnamese government early on; and introduce forces in their defense as the war escalated.

Assuming it is about a civil war, our national objectives of defending the South from the North, can be likened to an independent country taking sides with the Confederates during the American Civil War. Or, to carry it one step further, if Vietnam was a civil war, we could have been interfering with a country's right of self-determination. (9:3)

In discussing Somalia and what it is all about, we can see that the issue becomes easily clouded. First it was about feeding the starving. As we turned our forces over to U.N. control, it was about a civil conflict and a manhunt for a renegade general. I suggested earlier, we are currently experiencing a post Cold War dilemma on how to deal with hegemony and its world-wide implications. Additionally, our national interests have always been based on doing what we think is morally right; supporting good versus evil and in Somalia's case, helping to reduce starvation in an undernourished population.

The national objective in Somalia was clearly spelled out by then President Bush when he sent troops under U.S. command "... to ensure the delivery of U.N. relief supplies." (17:14) On 5 May 93, with food flowing the starving being fed, President Clinton declared:

*Today food is flowing and schools and hospitals are reopening. Though there is still much to be done if enduring peace is to prevail, one can now envision the day when Somalia will be reconstructed as a functioning civil society. (22:14)*

In May 1993 then, evidence shows that we had accomplished the national objectives that were originally spelled out by President Bush. However, one month later our troops were engaged in daily fighting with Aidid's forces. Additionally, the new administration was sending more troops to aid in the hunt for General Aidid. It appears that after accomplishing the goal of ensuring food distribution, the U.S. continued to remain active in Somalia, with troops at risk, with no clear future

*Such as... need to  
be...  
...?*

what does this mean? The Pres. The NSC  
CJCS, Air C... ? can you be more precise

policy or objectives. Now under the United Nations command, as U.S. forces became more involved in the hunt for Aidid, U.S. leadership began to realize that many Somalians did not want us interfering in their civil conflict.

The original Somali objectives became obscured and confused when the U.S. ceded command and control authority of U.S. troops to the United Nations (under UNOSOM II). (14:5) *"In successive resolutions, the U.N. charged these soldiers with the broad responsibilities of political reconciliation and restoration of law and order in Somalia."* (17:2)

If one looks closely at the history of Somalia, we can see that it has continually experienced internal conflicts. Even after gaining its independence in 1960, internal conflict continued. As late as 1991 Aidid was in a battle with other clan leaders for control of Mogadishu. As many as 30,000 Somalis were killed in these recent battles. (1:16) All together in 1992, there were 14 clans fighting for control of the country's leadership. These wars were severely disrupting food distribution, including relief supplies from the U.N. (1:16) I contend that the U.S. took sides in a civil war when our troops, under U.N. command, initiated the manhunt for Aidid.

We've discussed the similarities in national policy and objectives in Vietnam and Somalia. It is arguable that we entered civil wars. The U.S. entered each conflict driven by national policy that was inherited by new administrations. In the Vietnam conflict, our national objectives became preventing defeat of the south. In Somalia, our national objectives shifted from ensuring the distribution of food, to one of restoring law and order under U.N. command. With shifting and clouded national objectives, one can see that designing military strategy that supports the national objectives becomes very difficult. ✓

There was a battle  
between the Somali  
an article in the Wall  
Street Journal?

**QUESTION #2: IS THE NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY TAILORED TO MEET THE POLITICAL OBJECTIVES?**

Crowl asserts that there must be close collaboration between political ends and the military strategy to meet those ends. (4:6) It follows that if the military strategy does not support the political objectives, then the military strategy must be changed. (4:6) In discussing the correlation between political objectives and military strategy in Vietnam, it is instructive to discuss the late 1964 and early 1965 time frame and the "Rolling Thunder" bombing campaign. This was a time when the Johnson administration became concerned over lack of progress in settling the conflict. As was earlier said, Johnson had inherited the Vietnam situation when Kennedy was assassinated. Kennedy had not faced the tough decisions regarding escalation of the war. LBJ's national objectives in November 1964 were stated to be: ① Get Hanoi and North Vietnam support and direction removed from South Vietnam. ② Re-establish an independent and secure South Vietnam with appropriate safeguards, including the freedom to accept U.S. and other external assistance. ③ Maintain the security of other non-Communist nations in Southeast Asia. (23:19)

In achieving these objectives, the military had advocated "*Stronger, faster use of force based on applying maximum practicable conventional military power in a short time.*" (24:19) Civilian leadership however, "...*worried about relentless military pressure for escalation of war.*" (2:98) As a result, there was no logical strategy formulated to accomplish the stated objectives. (24:98) Additionally, the President insisted on day-to-day micro-management on the tactical aspects of the war. George Herring in Shadow On The White House, says that LBJ's:

*Entirely political manner of running the war, his consensus-oriented modus operandi...on issues of bombing targets, bombing pauses and troop levels...managed to keep controversy under control by*

*making concessions to each side without giving any side what it wanted. (2:98)*

President Johnson and Secretary MacNamara "...saw their primary task as maintaining tight operational control over the military." (2:97) This was apparent even in the ground war. William Westmoreland, Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), agreed that the U.S. possessed sufficient military strength to assure the survival of South Vietnam as an independent non-communist nation, but civilian leadership tied the hands of the military commanders who were responsible for conducting the war. (9:5) Regarding the Rolling Thunder air campaign from 1965-1967, LBJ continuously refused to grant military leaders permission to execute appropriate military strategy that would have forced North Vietnam to the peace table.

Additionally:

*Civilian bureaucrats in the Defense Department argued that an all out campaign might widen the war and would transmit a signal of strength out of all proportion to the limited objectives in South-East Asia, and foreclose the promise of achieving American goals at a relatively low level of violence. (7:273)*

Military strategy did not support political objectives. In Somalia, U.S. military leadership did not have its hands tied as in Vietnam. When the U.S. led military force landed with the objectives of guaranteeing distribution of food, I suggest that the military strategy was tailored to support the objective. U.S. forces secured vital facilities, and operated under "fire first" rules of engagement, "Allowing them to fire on anyone they consider a threat." (1:16)

The confusion began when U.N. Secretary General Boutros-Ghali stated that "Disarming the warlords is a 'prerequisite' to stability in the area." (1:16) In May 93, after giving command of the relief operation to the U.N. the U.S. considered the mission accomplished. The U.N., however,

began a massive manhunt for Aidid. The U.S. had reduced the number of troops from 28,000 to 5,000, which may have been too low for such a manhunt. U.N. forces, commanded by Gen Cevik Bir of Turkey, intensified military operations, which culminated in the deaths of 18 American soldiers in October 93. (1:16)

After the U.N. assumed command of the operation, we can clearly see a military strategy that did not support national objectives. Unlike Vietnam however, we initially had a viable military strategy in Somalia, i.e. to support food distribution. Unfortunately we were not quick to recognize when the objectives changed. I have said earlier that military strategy must support national objectives. When strategy does not support objectives it must be changed. Similarly, when objectives are changed, it is critical to re-look the military strategy and modify it to support the new objectives. I contend we did not do this when the U.N. changed the objectives to capture Aidid. President Clinton summarized this point when he said, "*The aggressive effort against the faction leader Mohammed Farah Aidid never should have been allowed to supplant the political process that was ongoing when we were in effective control up through last May.*" (7:1)

US military perception

### QUESTION #3: WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF MILITARY POWER?

Prior to entering any conflict, it is necessary to make an accurate assessment of the limits of the nation's and allies' military power. What are the limits on resources available? Is one limited by military capabilities? Or, do international and domestic policies place a limit on military options? (4:8) The above questions must be considered in terms of national objectives. It is possible that military power may be so limited as to prevent the accomplishment of specified objectives.



*not so sure on date here*

In Vietnam in late 1964, the Johnson administration became impatient in lack of progress that was being made in persuading North Vietnam to cease support of the Viet Cong. (3:49) After considering options against the North, an "NSC working group" laid out three air options. The first option (A) was unacceptable since it involved maintaining the status quo. The second option (B) was not acceptable since it involved a heavy air assault that would continue until Hanoi agreed to quit supporting the insurgency. This too proved unacceptable since although it had the highest chance of achieving objectives, it might provoke Chinese intervention. Thus the final option (C), a "milder campaign" that would stop when negotiations began, became the solution. (3:53) What eventually resulted in February 1965 was "Rolling Thunder" which began as a graduated barrage of attacks that slowly increased in intensity and distance north. (3:59)

Although designed to convince the North to stop providing support for the Viet Cong, the campaign failed to exert enough pressure on the north Vietnamese. To summarize the limits the Johnson administration placed on air power, Mark Clodfelter, in The Limits of Air Power, states:

*President Lyndon Johnson turned to air power to help achieve his positive goal of an independent, stable, non-Communist South Vietnam. At the same time, his negative objectives-to prevent a third world war and to keep both domestic and world public attention focused away from Vietnam-limited Rolling Thunder. Johnson believed that carefully controlled bombing would ultimately compel Hanoi to end the war by making it too costly. (3:204)*

The second limit on U.S. military power concerned the South Vietnamese government. The U.S. could not prevent the loss of South Vietnam to Communism, if its government did not have the support of its own people. Senator Church argued in 1965, " *...The hard fact is that there are limits to what we can do in helping any Government surmount a Communist uprising. If the people*

*themselves will not support the Government in power, we cannot save it...The Saigon Government is losing the war...for lack of internal cohesion."* (24:132)

In comparison, the U.S. military role in Somalia initially was limited to ensuring the distribution of food. First, there were restraints outlined in the U.N. resolution and chapter VII of the U.N. charter, which limited the rules of engagement. (14:8). Secondly, forces were there for humanitarian purposes. Thirdly, troops were operating in highly populated urban areas which severely limited the use of force. (14:8) Finally, in the summer of 1993 after U.N. Secretary General Boutros-Ghali initiated the manhunt for Aidid, I submit that military power was limited by lack of a government structure within Somalia to support such an operation. *Source: 20:46*

#### **QUESTION #4: WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?**

There are many political, economic, diplomatic, and military alternatives in any conflict. I will not discuss these options regarding Vietnam and Somalia. However in addressing alternatives it is critical that we ask: How will we terminate the action, war, or conflict? Or in today's terminology, what is our "exit strategy"? Concerning Vietnam, former President Nixon makes this point painfully clear in his book, No More Vietnams:

*Our critical error was to ignore one of the iron laws of war: Never go in without knowing how you are going to get out. Successive American administrations upped our commitment by increments-first in aid, then in noncombat advisors, and finally in combat soldiers-without having clearly in mind how these increases would achieve our goals. Policy makers based their decisions on what was needed to prevent defeat rather than what it would take to reach victory.*  
(20:46)

after the war!

Although this lesson was learned in the Vietnam war, the U.S. apparently forgot to apply it in Somalia. I submit that without an exit strategy it is easy to become slowly drawn deeper and deeper into conflict. The Clinton administration may have initially made this mistake. However key members of Congress had learned the exit strategy lesson from the Vietnam experience and articulated their concerns. One of the leading critics of this open ended commitment, Senator John McClain stated:

*During the Vietnam War debate, the late Senator Aiken said, "It's time to declare victory and go home." And that's clearly the case here. Our mission that was supported by the majority of American people was to keep a million Somalians from starving. We did that. Now we seem to be in some kind of open ended commitment: Nation building, restore law and order, searching for warlords. And I think, there are some Somalians who don't want us there. And frankly, I don't want us there either. (16:7)*

In Congress, many were afraid of being slowly drawn into the conflict much like we were drawn into Vietnam. The Clinton administration was persuaded to begin examining options for future peacekeeping missions. President Clinton summarized the new policy by saying:

*The United States had begun asking tougher questions about new peacekeeping missions, such as: "Is there a real threat to international peace? Does the proposed mission have clear objectives? Can an end point be identified...? How much will the mission cost?" (16:7)*

There was no clear exit strategy in Vietnam or Somalia. Without a clear exit strategy, it becomes easy to lose sight of the objectives and popular support easily erodes.

and Somalia were  
very different "wars"?  
Was Somalia a "war"?

## QUESTION #5: HOW STRONG IS THE HOME FRONT?

Crowl calls it the home front. He asks further, "*Does public opinion support the war and the military strategy employed to fight it? How much stress can civilian society endure under the pressures demanded?*" (4:9) In Vietnam, the U.S. perceived itself as the world's policeman, engaged in battle to protect a small country from Communism. The dangers of Communist aggression and the Cold War had been ingrained in the minds of the American population. Therefore I submit there was initially widespread support for our entrance into Vietnam.

Likewise concerning our entrance into Somalia, I suggest the U.S. public perceived its actions to feed the starving were morally correct. The Bush administration had clearly articulated the objectives and the mission was considered a low threat, humanitarian mission with little chance of escalation. Public support eroded in each conflict when American losses began to increase while progress towards objectives stagnated. In Vietnam, Communist infiltration continued. In Somalia objectives changed to manhunts and nation-building. Both conflicts were "limited action" situations. George Herring states that:

*One of the most important tasks of the commander in chief in the U.S. is to generate and maintain public support, and in a limited war this is especially hard to do. Unlike his counterpart engaged in total war the president cannot rally the nation to the war and himself, yet he must sustain public support. (2:9)*

Neither Presidents Johnson nor Clinton could maintain public support for conflicts in these far off lands where many began to realize they were not critical to national security while American lives were being lost. I suggest that future limited actions must be of short duration, with clearly defined objectives and minimal casualties unless national survival is at stake.

**QUESTION #6: DOES TODAY'S STRATEGY OVERLOOK POINTS OF DIFFERENCE AND EXAGGERATE POINTS OF LIKENESS BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT?**

I suggest that this question asks one to consider lessons learned from previous conflicts, but to expect that they may not always fully apply in the next conflict. I submit that by referring to lessons learned from previous conflicts, one can spur creative thinking to arrive at better solutions when dealing with new situations. That is what this article is about. I have attempted to high light issues that became problems in Somalia because the U.S. did not fully consider lessons of a similar conflict; namely Vietnam. The lessons illustrated here should be stored in one's memory for future reference.

**SUMMARY - LESSONS FOR FUTURE APPLICATION**

Vietnam and Somalia; when we think of one conflict, what makes us think of the other? Is it because both were civil conflicts in far off lands on the margins of U.S. national interests? Or, is it because they were inherited by new administrations led by presidents who had little military experience and who were working aggressive domestic agendas?

I submit that my analysis suggests Vietnam and Somalia were cases where national objectives and military strategy became disconnected. The analysis using Crowl's questions suggests that both conflicts were civil wars, making it very difficult to set achievable objectives. Key however, is that once objectives were set, military strategy and power were limited to the extent that achieving the objectives became impossible.

Again using the Vietnam Rolling Thunder campaign for illustration, military strategy and power were limited by an administration that did not use its military expertise to design strategy that would

*There is no such thing as a free lunch  
Says ?*

*Didn't national objective change - The period*

achieve objectives. The campaign's gradual increase in bombing intensity and frequent bombing halts from 1965-1967 proved to be ineffective in persuading North Vietnam to cease its support of the Viet Cong, which was a primary U.S. objective.

In Somalia, under U.N. control, the objectives were in fact expanded to pursue a renegade leader after U.S. force numbers were reduced. I suggest that this acted to limit the capability of military power to the point that capture of Aidid was unlikely. The disconnects between the objectives initially established by the Bush administration and later changed by the U.N., should motivate U.S. senior leaders to look at how U.S. forces should play in future U.N. missions.

Peacekeeping roles, humanitarian missions and the radical increase in post Cold War cultural conflicts, have made it much more difficult to cleanly enter, influence, and exit turbulent areas.

Regarding future conflicts, Samuel Huntington states:

*Fundamental sources of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of the conflict will be cultural. (11: 23)*

Huntington says that countries will more likely be defined by their culture and civilization. He further defines civilization as a "cultural entity which includes villages, regions, ethnic groups and religions." (11:23) I suggest that when we compare Vietnam and Somalia to Huntington's views, they display characteristics of conflicts we will see in the future.

In dealing with future conflicts of this nature I submit that there are new questions we should ask before committing U.S. forces:

1. Is the conflict or action truly in U.S. national interests?
  - a. If the action is under U.N. auspices, do U.N. objectives align with U.S. national interests?

*Isn't this the same thing as support of UN or UN objectives?*

23

2. What are the historical and cultural considerations in the conflict? Do the forces at odds actually want the conflict to be resolved?

3. Does accomplishing the objectives present an exit option?

Regarding the first question, before entering any future conflict, we must determine if it is actually within our national interests. This was an easier question to answer prior to the Soviet Union's disintegration where any Communist expansion involved national interest. Currently there are regional conflicts involving atrocities that appeal to our human values, but serve few U.S. national interests. If a conflict is not within our national interest, we need to stay out of it. Additionally, if a proposed U.N. objective conflicts with U.S. national interests, then the U.S. is obligated to protest the objectives and, if necessary withdraw involvement in the operation.

Regarding my second question, U.S. leadership must become better versed in history and cultural aspects of the parties in conflict. I contend we did not do this well in Vietnam or Somalia. This knowledge will help determine if the conflict is civil or a centuries long feudal contest. If the conflict has been ongoing for decades or centuries with no indications that the parties desire realistic solutions, then military intervention is not likely to provide a solution with a viable exit option.

Concerning objectives, in future conflicts we must tie exit strategies to objectives. Do the objectives offer an exit potential? Or, after these objectives are accomplished, will the original reason for entering the conflict still exist. I suggest that it is necessary to ask this question since, in regional conflicts and peacekeeping efforts, it may be hard to determine if the objectives have been permanently achieved, or whether the solution is a temporary one.

In closing, Jay Luvaas states in his article, "*Military History: Is It Still Practicable?*", that:

*Perhaps the most frequent error in the abuse of history is to take historical examples out of context.*

*Once removed from its historical context, which is always unique, a battle...ceases to offer meaningful lessons from history...if there is a lesson here...it is simply that solutions to problems are not to be viewed as interchangeable parts. (15:3)*

In comparing Vietnam and Somalia and discussing similarities and lessons learned, it is important that we consider what Lurvaas says in the above quote. We cannot directly apply every lesson learned in Vietnam to Somalia and to new regional conflicts. Rather, knowledge of lessons learned from previous conflicts will allow us to meet these new conflicts with a heightened awareness of what has worked in the past.

In the preceding paragraphs I have shown areas where we repeated mistakes of the Vietnam conflict in Somalia. It is apparent that U.S. senior leadership could have considered lessons learned in Vietnam and applied them when considering options in Somalia. Sometimes we may have to say, "Deja Vu." If we have to say "Deja Vu all over again," because we refuse to learn from past mistakes, then in Harry Summers' view, it becomes farce. (23:16)

*Nice job — A tough issue that needs more hard thought. You've laid out some parameters for future development —*



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